

224 b 10

THE
INDISPENSIBLE DUTY
OF FREQUENTING the
Publick Worship
OF
G O D,
And the Behaviour required therein.

By THOMAS TALBOT, D.D. *K*
Rector of the Parishes of ULLINGSWICK and
LITTLE COWARN, in HEREFORDSHIRE.

In specie autem fictæ simulationis, sicut reliquæ virtutes, ita Piétas inesse non potest; cum quâ simul et sanctitatem et religionem tolli necesse est: quibus sublati, perturbatio vitæ sequitur, et magna confusio. Atque haud scio, an pietate adversus Deos sublatâ, fides etiam, et societas generis humani, et una excellentissima virtus, justitia, tollatur.

CICERO de Nat. Deor. l. i. f. 2.

L O N D O N :

Printed for J. BUCKLAND, in Pater-noster-row,
M DCC LXIV.

311

Public Works



P R E F A C E.

THE following treatise is unquestionably upon a subject of the utmost importance to the comfort and happiness of individuals, and the peace and welfare of society—That *worship of God*, without which even the practice of moral virtue can't be duly supported amongst mankind, nor encouraged and enforced by such motives, as are sufficient to balance those powerful temptations to vice, which every age, and every nation, so plentifully abound with.

The fear of God, or an habitual respect to his being, perfections, providence and

A

will, is necessarily supposed and implied in the rational and acceptable worship of him, and is at the same time impressed and strengthened by men's frequent and habitual attendance on it. This sacred disposition, as it is fit and becoming in its nature, is of perpetual use in human life;—is that by which men are most effectually led to depart from evil, and most powerfully excited to think of, and do those things which are excellent and praise worthy. But how can this reverential awe of God be kept up, and rendered so habitual to the mind, as to become a genuine principle of action, and influence men to discharge their duty in the respective stations, which nature and providence have placed them in? It is to be feared, that many persons seldom or never think of God, their relations and obligations to him;—never offer up their thanksgivings to him for the mercies they enjoy, for the means of grace, and the hopes of glory;—never make their prayers and supplications to

P R E F A C E.

iii

him, in acknowledgment of their dependance on him, for the daily blessings they stand in need of, and that they may finally obtain eternal life;—never read that good word of God, which best describes what he is, and what they have to hope, and fear from him;—never attend that ministry of the word, which was instituted for their instruction; nor join in those solemn services of the church, which are appointed as a publick protest for the being and providence of God, and as a memorial of his creating, governing, and redeeming the world by Jesus Christ his Son: And can there be any due reverence for God maintained, without these means to excite, cultivate, and establish it? It is impossible in its nature; and we know by too satisfying and melancholy an experience, that such persons, of all ranks and degrees, who habitually neglect, and throw contempt upon the institutions of private and publick worship, are generally

as destitute of all regard to God, and utter strangers to the influence of his fear.

Now let any considerate person reflect with himself, and seriously think ; when there is no fear of God before men's eyes, nor any principles and dispositions of religion to influence and govern them, what guides they are left to the direction of, and what must be the necessary motives of their habitual conduct. They can, in the nature of things, be no other than those of their own passions and appetites, the customs and prevailing manners of mankind, personal advantage, pleasure and conveniency, with other things of like nature : All which are considerations of little or no force, abstracted from other things, to secure the practice of moral virtue ; or indeed rather tend to subvert the foundations of it,—to destroy all regard thereto, and to lead mankind into all the enormities of wickedness and vice.

P R E F A C E.

For if men have no other rules of action but those which I have just mentioned;—if their passions have nothing to curb and restrain them;—if the customs of the world favour their indulgence;—if example and fashion recommend and encourage this, and men have no other reasons to abstain from the most criminal liberties, but conveniency or safety; it is evident, that within these bounds they may be as wicked as they please, and that they can have no arguments and motives to preserve them from the grossest crimes, their corrupt inclinations may lead them to the commission of.

This, undoubtedly, is the true cause of that prodigious depravity of manners, which so much prevails in the world. Men first grow extremely profane, and then desperately wicked. They have left off to worship God, and then become void of all reverence to the laws of God and man. God is not in all their thoughts, and

therefore they are driven by their passions to work out all iniquity with greediness, and will go with the multitude to do evil, without regarding the consequences of their actions, or attending to the ruin in which their conduct must finally involve them.

Such persons therefore, who are real friends to moral virtue, and wish to see it prevail amongst all ranks and degrees of men, such as wish well to the peace of society, and the prosperity of their Country, must, one would think, be as real friends to true religion; — attend themselves on the services of the church, and encourage and recommend the worship of God by their own example: because it hath been found constantly true, that no prevailing sense of God can be kept up in the minds of such persons, who wholly estrange themselves from his worship; and that no considerations will be sufficient to keep men steadily virtuous, if they have thrown off all fear of almighty God, and

will not retain the knowledge and thoughts of him in their hearts.

If indeed, men are determined to go on in their vices without reformation, it is no wonder they should harden themselves against the fear of God, and utterly abstain from all those means, which tend to cultivate and improve this sacred disposition. For where there is any abiding sense of God, men will, whenever they reflect, be uneasy in their own minds, at the remembrance of their crimes; and naturally strive to get intirely rid of all those considerations, which would check and terrify them in their criminal practices, if they are determined at all events to persevere in them. And I doubt not, that this is too generally the reason why so many abstain from the services of the Church, *viz.* because they do not care to be put in mind of their sins, or to hear of the hazard they run by committing them.

The services of our church are excellently well adapted to bring bad men to recollection, and excite them to repentance and amendment. The general confession, repeated by all after the minister, is very solemn and affecting; and the petitions, "*spare thou them, O God, which confess their faults:*" "*restore thou them that are penitent;*" certainly imply, that men cannot expect God should spare them, if they do not seriously confess their faults; — or that he will restore them to favour, if they are not true penitents; *i. e.* sorry for their past sins, and determined for the future to amend them. The absolution also, pronounced by the minister, is intirely confined to those who *truly repent, and unfeignedly believe* God's *holy gospel*; and he who hears it pronounced, without being determined to repent, or who is conscious, that he doth not unfeignedly believe his holy gospel, hath no part in this absolution, and renounceth the hope of God's forgiveness. The prayers, that God in his good-

ness would deliver us *from evil, from sin, from the crafts and assaults of the devil, from blindness of heart, pride, vain-glory, envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness, from hardness of heart, and contempt of his word and commandment*: — these, and the like prayers, I say, can never be joined in, without the most detestable hypocrisy, profaneness and impiety, if those who say them are not convinced of the danger of these crimes, and really desirous, that God would deliver them from all these dreadful evils. In a word, all the confessions and supplications of the church service carry, in their very nature, a protest against the several vices of mankind; — shew the necessity of their repentance and amendment, as they hope to obtain God's forgiveness of them thereby, and attain at last *his eternal joy, through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Now, how can it be expected, that men who have thrown off all principles, or who are so determined in a sinful life, as to have neither resolution or desire to mend it,

should have any inclination to, or take any pleasure in those services of the church, in which if they join, they profess thereby to believe what they disbelieve; and make confession of sins which they never intend to forsake, and are put in mind of that displeasure of almighty God they don't care to hear of, and can't hear of without being reproached by their own consciences for those evil works, by which they justly expose themselves to the dreadful effects of it.

Should this growing evil, of forsaking the public worship of God, become general, what must the consequence be, but an unbounded licentiousness of manners; — the dissolution of all order in Society, — the disturbance of civil government, and the endangering, if not subverting of our constitution: — Evils, which every good man trembles to think of, and should use his utmost endeavours to prevent: — Evils, which must sooner or later take place, in the common course of things, if the sense

P R E F A C E.

xi

of Deity be not kept up in the minds of men, and a due regard paid to the day appointed for public worship, and the services of the church performed on it; which are the only possible means, by which the fear of God can be perpetuated amongst the generality of mankind.

The laborious and poorer part of the nation can scarce possibly arrive, without public instruction, at any proper degree of knowledge; but must continue sunk in ignorance; and consequently fall into the lowest dregs of wickedness. Many of them cannot so much as read; others have no books of instruction, and are no ways capable of instructing their families; and without some instructors, how is it possible they should understand their duty to God or man? There are some persons indeed who think, the poor should not understand too much; through an apprehension, that it will render them proud and insolent, and above the labours and services which are

peculiar to their stations. But this is a great mistake; a wrong behaviour in every condition being the certain effect of ignorance; and not of real knowledge: And there cannot be so strong and powerful an obligation on the consciences of men to act well, in all the various circumstances of life, as that which arises from the fear of God, and a real persuasion, that their obtaining his favour, and avoiding his displeasure, depend on their living righteously, and discharging with fidelity all the peculiar duties which respectively belong to them.

And would not men be in the ready way to attain this fear of God, which is productive of so many amiable effects, could they be prevailed with, regularly, to attend the services of the Church on the Lord's day? And as scarce any thing is more likely to engage them to this, than the examples of their superiors, how earnestly is it to be wished, that the great

and rich would, by their own regular attendance on them, encourage and persuade those, over whom they have authority and influence, to a constant appearance in their proper places at divine worship on the Lord's day. This would be an instance of a truly publick spirit. For, as the lower classes of men constitute by far the greatest part of the nation, the keeping them within the bounds of religion and virtue, would be making them useful members of society, and contributing, in the most essential manner, to the publick welfare.

Would those persons who are of superior rank and condition be more attentive to this, they would soon experience the happy effects of it themselves, in the peace and good order of their families. There is no complaint, I believe, more general, or for which perhaps there is more reason, than *the badness of servants*. And how should it be otherwise? They have

been too often brought up ignorant and profane, without any good principles to enlighten and improve them, and so make no conscience of doing their duty, and approving themselves diligent and faithful in the families to which they hire themselves: And if they are not obliged by their superiors to attend on the services of the Church, they must continue without any sense of their duty; and it will be no wonder, if from bad they grow worse, and prove the scourges and plagues of the families which harbour them. But if they are obliged, and especially encouraged by the example of those they serve, regularly to perform their duty, by attending at Church on the Lord's day, there will be hopes of their amendment: And if once they can be persuaded to make conscience of serving others with fidelity, they will hereby become real blessings in their stations, and, in the most essential manner, contribute to the peace and comfort of the families in which they dwell.

P R E F A C E.

xv

If those in the lower stations of life would but consider their own real advantage, they would never neglect the publick worship of God. They cannot but know, this to be their duty; and it is always a satisfaction to any one, to know that he doth his duty. They can make no excuses, generally, for not doing it, which will justify them in such a neglect. The Lord's day is a day of rest from labour. Why then cannot they employ their leisure in gaining useful knowledge, and in worshipping God their Creator and Redeemer? The labours of the field will prosper never the less, if the husbandman implores the divine blessing on them; nor will men be less likely to be preserved from lightening and tempest, from plague, pestilence, and famine, because they pray every *Sunday, Good Lord, deliver us* from them; nor will they themselves be less diligent in managing their affairs, or less likely to succeed therein, because they seriously make the following petition, "*That*
" it may please thee, to give and preserve to

*“ our use, the kindly fruits of the earth, so
“ as in due time we may enjoy them,”* In a word, whatever be the labours, and lower employments of life, in which any persons are engaged, the way to prosper, and to be easy and happy in their circumstances, is (in the words of the holy apostle) *there-in to abide with God*, by acknowledging their dependence on him, attending on the stated means of grace, and paying regularly their devotions to him.

To promote this great and useful design, I have offered to the publick this small treatise: And I shall think myself extremely happy, should I in any measure check the growing profaneness of the age I live in, by persuading those, into whose hands these sheets may fall, to that religious observance of the Lord's day; without which, I am fully convinced, a due sense of religion can never be supported; nor consequently the true happiness of these nations be ever established on a solid and lasting foundation.

THE
INDISPENSIBLE DUTY
OF FREQUENTING THE
PUBLIC WORSHIP OF GOD.

THE gross neglect, which many are guilty of, in absenting themselves from the public worship of God, and the unbecoming behaviour which may be observed in some who attend it, render it needful, that both the one and the other should be reminded of their duty, and made sensible of their obligations to perform it as they ought.

I shall first address myself to those, who by choice seldom appear at church, or in

2 *The Indispensible Duty of frequenting*

any religious assemblies; and will endeavour to convince them of the unreasonableness of such their wilful absence, by reminding them

First, How contrary it is to that, which hath been the general practice of mankind, and how opposite to the dictates of reason.

Secondly, To the revealed will of God.

Thirdly, How repugnant to their christian profession, and the essential character of all true christians. And withal shall shew the bad consequences of their conduct to themselves, and of their ill example to others.

(1) It is a contradiction, or contrariety to that, which has been the general practice of mankind; and I would desire them to consider, that so great, and so general a regard has, in all ages, been paid to public worship, that under all the mistakes and misapprehensions of men, concerning the true nature of

the object of that worship, and amidst all the diversity of opinions which has prevailed, with respect to the mode or manner of performing it; still it has remained a doctrine, in which mankind have generally agreed, that public worship should be performed, as a duty of all men.

And whence should such an opinion have arisen, and continued through the several generations of men, but from the dictates of our common reason? For, how very strongly and easily might it be inferred by all, who lived in the belief of a Supreme Being, the Creator and Governor of all things, that he is worthy the adoration and worship of all his reasonable creatures; and that each for himself was obliged, by virtue of that dependance which creatures have on their Creator, to ask of him those things which they stand in need of, and to return him the tribute of their praise and thanksgivings, for the private and particular blessings which they enjoyed?

And the inference from hence is farther equally reasonable, that when men were formed into societies, and stood in need of those things, which were necessary to the safety and flourishing estate thereof; they ought, as all the members of such societies have a joint concern in whatever related to their common peace and welfare, with one voice and consent, to pray for the vouchsafement of such blessings, in social or public worship; and in like manner make grateful and public acknowledgments, with united praises and thanksgivings, on their receiving those blessings. What is there herein, which is not most agreeable to the dictates of reason, which is the law of our nature? We often indeed deviate from it, Therefore we may observe,

(2) That God, in his wisdom and goodness, gave an early and express revelation of his will herein, by the appointment of the Sabbath-day, at the close of the creation; when our Maker is said, * to

* Gen. ii. v. 3.

have sanctified it ; that is, pronounced it holy, separated, or set it apart for holy uses ; for that is the signification of the words, *sanctifying a thing* ; and when God so sanctified the seventh day, it may well be interpreted as a declaration of his will, that it should be *sanctified*, set apart by us, as it had been by himself, for his service, and for his public worship.

Accordingly, we find, that *Cain* and *Abel*, the two eldest of the children of *Adam*, agreed herein, that publick acknowledgments were to be made unto the Lord ; for they brought their respective offerings before him, at a set time ; which there is no room to doubt, was the time so lately sanctified, or set a-part, for such purposes. And, at the conclusion of the same chapter, when *Seth*, another son born unto *Adam*, had himself a son, called *Enos*, we read : *Then men began to call on the name of the Lord*, with public forms of worship, and with unity and agreement

6. *The Indispensible Duty of frequenting*

therein, as some learned men have, with good reason, been of opinion. And as such public religious service could not be performed, without some one to preside therein; so, long before the institution of the Jewish priesthood, long before any tabernacle or temple was erected, or any services were ordered to be performed therein, we read, * of *Melchisedeck*, as *priest of the Most High God*, as well as king of *Salem*. For kings were priests in these early days; therefore were obliged to have regard to their office in each respect; and if appointed as priests for their people in things pertaining to God, they could not discharge their duty in this part of the trust, without requiring those of their household, to assemble for the worship of God, especially on his Sabbaths, which he had sanctified.

Hence, that divine commendation given to *Abraham*, who was honoured as a mighty prince by those among whom he lived †: *I know him*, says God himself, *that he will command his children, and his*

* Gen. iv.

† Gen. xxiii. 6.

household after him; and they shall keep the way of the Lord *. Of these words it is no strained, or forced interpretation, to say, that the religious observance of the Sabbath by himself and his household is included in them; for, to keep the way of the Lord, is to persist in the worship and service of God †. And how can we keep the way of the Lord, in any better, or in any other manner, than by doing that which he has commanded; or how persist in his worship and service, without a religious observance of the day appropriated by himself to his worship, sanctified, set apart for that end? *Abraham's* regard to this, and taking care that others, under his command, behaved in like manner, was, we may justly believe, in great measure, the foundation of that commendation, which is recorded to his immortal honour; for it is assigned as the cause, or reason, of that gracious declaration, that *in him should all the families of the earth be blessed* ‡.

* Gen. xviii. 19.

† Gen. xviii. 18.

‡ See Bishop Patrick on the Place.

Let none then think, that the obligation to keep the Sabbath holy, for the purposes of religious worship, had its rise at the delivery of the Law from Mount *Sinai*; for before the delivery of the Law, we find the Sabbath mentioned, and a very religious regard enjoined to be had thereto, as a duty to which mankind were no strangers *. And in the fourth commandment we find, it is spoken of as a day well known to be set apart for an holy rest, or Sabbath, even from the beginning of the world †. So that from hence it appears, that those who now refuse to join in public worship; who, though calling themselves Christians, are seldom or never seen in the congregations of Christians, not even on the Lord's day, are herein grievous transgressors of their duty; and that they act contrary to the revealed will of God under every dispensation of religion.

This is evident from the original institution of the Sabbath in the first age of the

* Exod. xvi. 23, 26. † Exod. xx. 11.

world ; its observance under the patriarchal state ; from the renewal of the command to keep it holy, at the delivery of this law, among others, by the ministry of Moses ; and from its being frequently inculcated, during the ministry of the prophets who succeeded him ; who often rebuked the profanations thereof, and reminded those, to whom they were sent, of the high regard which was due thereto ; that God claimed it as his day, calling it, by his prophet *Isaiab*, MY HOLY DAY ; and that it was their duty to account the keeping of it holy, *to be honourable*, as what would redound to their honour, as the same prophet assures us *.

And that the religious observance of one day in seven, freed from all superstitious and uncharitable constructions of that rest which was enjoined thereon, is a duty of perpetual obligation, may be concluded from hence : That when our Lord corrected the *Jews* for their superstitious observance of their Sabbath, he doth not correct them.

* *Isaiab* lviii. 13.

for observing the day, but their mistakes, as to the manner of their observing it, and the nature of that rest, which they imagined was enjoined on it; as if no works, not even those of necessity, with respect to ourselves, nor those of mercy and charity, with respect to others, could be allowed to be performed thereon. This opinion he reproves and refutes, by appealing to the example of holy *David*, in a case of necessity *, and by shewing it was contrary to their own allowed practice, in works necessary to be done for the service of God in his temple, or for the preservation of the lives of their beasts †. But he leaves the command in its full force, as to our obligation of observing the Sabbath, as a day of rest from our common and ordinary employments, that we may have sufficient leisure to attend on the worship of God, according to his own example herein; for he himself frequented their synagogues on that day ‡, and declared, that the Sabbath was made for man ||;

* Matth. xii. 3, 4, 5. † Luke xiv. 5. ‡ Mark
 || Mark ii. 27.

that is, had its appointment from a regard to the welfare of our bodies and our souls. But man being a composition of both soul and body, the Sabbath could not have been said to be made for man, if any thing, necessary to the welfare either of our soul or body, might be wilfully neglected by us thereon.

Great indeed is the encouragement our Saviour has given us, to assemble together for this purpose, and to pay a due regard to the time appropriated to, and set apart by God himself for it; for he has promised the blessing of his favourable presence with those, who assemble in his name, having assured us, that *where two or three are gathered together in his name, there is he in the midst of them* *. Therefore those who constituted the first visible church of Christ continued, we read, *stedfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship*, which was that of Christ, *and in breaking of bread and in prayers* †. And afterwards, when some of the converted *Hebrews*, terrified

* Matth. xviii. 20.

† Acts ii. 42.

by the adversaries of the Christian faith, became fearful of joining with their fellow *Christians* in public worship, or were negligent in their attendance thereon; as a reproof of them, and an admonition to all who should be guilty of the same fault, the apostle to the *Hebrews* gives the caution, *of not forsaking the assembling ourselves together, as the manner of some is* †; and this caution was, with the greatest reason, given. For all persons who refuse to assemble themselves with their *Christian* brethren, for the purpose of public religious worship, make a near approach to that sin of apostacy from the *Christian* faith, which is *the wilful sin* spoken of in the next verse. Neither let it seem strange, that the refusing to assemble ourselves together, with our *Christian* brethren, for public worship, should be joined with apostacy, as deserving the like punishment: for it stands as apostacy does, in direct opposition, as I may observe,

† Heb. x. 25.

(3) To our *Christian* profession, and to the practice of all true *Christians* from the beginning. This appears from the earliest and most authentic accounts we have of their practice. Certain it is, that those who, in the primitive times, became members of the church of *Christ*, assembled on the Lord's day, not only for the more especial commemoration of the great work of the creation, but of our redemption also by *Jesus Christ*; a redemption manifestly completed by his resurrection from the dead, on our *Christian Sabbath*. So that, as the deliverance of the *Israelites* from their *Egyptian* bondage, was commanded to be commemorated on the *Jewish Sabbath*, *Christians* have, from the time of our Lord's resurrection, held themselves obliged to celebrate the like thankful remembrance of our redemption, on the first day of the week, which has ever since been called *the Lord's Day*, and *Sunday*. Thus *Justin Martyr*, in full agreement with other writers, concerning the practice of the primitive church in this par-

14 *The Indispensible Duty of frequenting*
particular : “ On Sunday (says he) all *Chri-*
“ *stians* in the city and country meet toge-
“ ther, because that is the day of our
“ Lord’s resurrection ; and then we read
“ the writings of the prophets and apostles.
“ This being done, the president or mini-
“ ster makes an oration to the assembly,
“ to exhort them to imitate and do the
“ things they have heard. Then we all
“ join in prayers, and, after that, receive
“ the sacrament *.”

And does not the contemptuous neglect
of the *Christian* Sabbath declare openly
and plainly, that we lightly esteem at least
the blessings which others then assemble to
commemorate, if not utterly disbelieve
that there are such to be received ? And
what is this less than a kind of renuncia-
tion of the hopes, privileges, and blessings,
to which, as *Christians*, we become inti-
tled ? Is it not, in fact, an avowal, that
we value nothing but the name of *Chri-*
stians, and are regardless of what should

* See Dr. Whitby’s Comment on 1 Cor. xvi. 2.

be our character as such? Does not this look very like an apostacy from the *Christian* faith? And may it not then deserve something like the punishment threatned thereto†? Consider,

4thly, That we herein act contrary to one of the articles of that creed, into which we have been baptized:—that article, I mean, wherein we profess to believe in the holy catholic church, the communion of saints; for *a. communion of saints*, which in our creed we profess to believe, implies an obligation to communicate with our *Christian* brethren in all holy offices of devotion. But how can we communicate with others in these offices, without assembling together, and actually joining with them for this purpose? or how assemble for this purpose, without regarding, or without complying with, the appointment of time and place for that end? To refuse then to assemble on the day, and in

† See Heb. x. 26, 27.

the place appointed for the worship of God, wilfully and habitually to be guilty hereof, is nothing less than using our wicked endeavour to annihilate, to put an end to, that church into which we have been baptized, by not joining with others in those holy offices of piety, wherein the communion of saints consists. For *Christians* are in Scripture called *saints*, from their obligation to approve themselves such, by the performance of those holy offices, which are agreeable to that holy * character. And what would become of the church of *Christ*, of the holy catholic church, if, after the manner of some, it should altogether cease to perform those holy offices? Or, how can they be true members thereof, who refuse to join with others therein? Can any thing be more contrary to the character of a *Christian*, than the refusing to do those things, on the performance whereof the very being of

* 1 Cor. i. 2. *Called to be saints*, compared with the address to the same persons, who are so stiled, 2 Cor. i. 1. and with the behaviour of some reprehended in each of those epistles, wherein they are so called.

the church of *Christ*, as it implies a communion of saints, or of *Christians* in all holy offices, depends? For *St. Peter*, describing the church of *Christ* by its essential characters, thus addressed himself to the *Christians* in his time: *Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should shew forth the praises of him, who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light*.*.

Lastly, let it be considered, whether by so profanely negligent a behaviour, you take not the most effectual means of extinguishing all sense of religion in your own mind, and in that of others, by your ill example. Most certainly this will be the case with respect to yourselves. For a sense of religion, or of the obligations of religion, is preserved by the exercise only of religious acts. Discontinue the performance of those acts, the persuasion or belief of our obligation thereto will

* 1 Pet. ii. 9.

decay, and die away of course; and no motives to virtuous living, of the virtuous kind, will be left, which will have any efficacy to keep us within the bounds of our duty, whenever we are tempted to transgress, for the sake of any present profit or pleasure; and how many such temptations we meet with, and of how great force they they are, every day's experience testifies. But, *how can I do this wickedness, and sin against God?* is a reflection, which would powerfully tend to check the violence of any sinful passion, pushing us on, at any rate, to compass its gratification. And how is this salutary, this necessary reflection to be kept always ready at hand, to be set in opposition to all the temptations to wickedness, which so frequently occur? How, but by putting ourselves in the way of having it frequently excited in us, by hearing our duty frequently set before us, and by such acts of worship, as we are called upon to perform, jointly with others, in the assemblies held for public worship; held

for this very purpose, that all who are present therein may contribute their part, in exciting each other to pay that homage which is due to our great Creator, and to quicken and keep alive that sense of our obligations to perform his will, which is necessary to be preserved, in order to our performance of it. Those therefore who wilfully refuse (and wilfully to neglect is wilfully to refuse) to be present at such assemblies, take an effectual method of extinguishing, in their own mind, the sense of all religious obligation to the performance of their duty, and as effectual a method of propagating the contagion of wickedness to all around them, by their ill example.

Need we here be told, how mischievous the influence of a bad example is? that it encourages all those who are ill disposed, to a continuance in the same evil way, wherein they see others allow themselves? The greatest part of mankind, being more prone to that which is evil than to that which is good, are generally pleased

with having others give some countenance to their evil practices, by their indulging in the same. For hereby the odious character of singularity is avoided; they are not pointed at, as doing what few, or none besides themselves adventure, or are bold enough to do; and from hence, they assume a confidence in behaving amiss. This is the common case of all the workers of iniquity; and of none more so, than of those who shew their disregard to the public worship of God, by their frequent or total absence from it. So that all such persons may be justly considered as ministers of the kingdom of darkness, as agents or factors for promoting irreligion, by behaving in such a manner, as naturally and necessarily tends to efface in their own mind, and in that of others, all that reverence towards their Maker, which is cherished and kept alive by the worship of God, and is no otherwise to be preserved, than by a frequent resort to the places set a-part for it, at the times appointed for that holy exercise.

Can we then think that iniquity little, which has so direct a tendency to make us live as without God in the world? Can the great and the wealthy (whose practice makes the fashions of the world) by their example, teach a disregard to the time set a-part for public worship? Can they, without any real necessity, chuse the Sabbath for setting out on their journies, either of pleasure or business, or spend it in idle and vain amusements, and not account themselves greatly guilty therein? I am sorry there is so much occasion given for reproof of those, whom I had much rather speak of with honour and respect.

It may justly be hoped and expected, that if the reason of things, and the obligations of duty, have not that weight they ought to have, with those who take these unwarrantable freedoms, the amiable pattern of our most gracious sovereign may make such, as hold the high ranks and stations of life, ashamed of these indecencies. It is well known, that his Majesty is not only constant in his

resort to the place of public worship on this day, but strictly regular in his deportment during the time of divine service ; allows of no levity in his own behaviour, and discourages, as much as possible, all inattention in others, to the great work which is then transacting. May his great and excellent example be attended with all that good effect on others which it ought to have, and his Majesty, we may be sure, desires it should have!

But omitting at present what may be justly farther said, concerning the manner wherein we ought to attend the public worship, we may and ought to consider, what human laws, particularly those of our own nation, have enacted, to oblige our resort thereto. For the laws of men derive an obligation, in conscience, on those who are subject to the power and authority of the civil magistrate, in all cases wherein the good of the community is manifestly concerned ; as it most certainly is, in the securing and promoting the practice of true

religion and virtue. For, as in these cases, the civil power acts in perfect agreement with the end and design of the divine appointment thereof; so our obedience, or subjection thereto is, in effect, submitting to the ordinance of God; as *St. Paul* most justly argues *.

How then stands this matter with respect to human laws? We have one, I think, which might easily, and should constantly be put in force by justices of the peace, on complaint made of such neglects, for which no satisfactory excuse can be given. For, by the statute of the 3d of *James* the First, chap. 4. “for each offence of this kind, proved
“by one witness upon oath, the sum of one
“shilling may be levied by any one justice
“of the peace, of the division where the offender liveth, by distress; and if distress
“cannot be had, then the offender may be
“committed.” If this law was put in execution, by levying the pecuniary fine it inflicts, though it be but a small one, yet, I

* *Rom.* xiii.

apprehend, it would in many instances restrain such immoral behaviour, remove much of the scandal given thereby, and prove the likely means of giving transgressors such a sense of their guilt, as would at length make them avoid such offences, from an higher and better motive than that of temporal punishment.

Having thus considered the several obligations we lie under to public worship, especially on the Lord's-day; it comes next to be considered, in what manner it ought to be performed by us, both with respect to the outward, and inward requisites thereof. The internal, or inward requisites thereof have respect to the apprehensions and belief we ought to have, of the divine excellencies and perfections of God our Creator. The outward requisites of that worship, with which we ought to worship him, consist in the making proper acknowledgments, or giving proper proofs, of our having a real belief and becoming apprehensions of his divine excellencies or perfections.

(1) As to the internal requisites of that worship which is due unto God, they consist in our having proper apprehensions of the excellences of the divine nature, which are those adorable perfections, from whence the worship of God becomes due from us. For all worship, however outwardly expressed, is, or should be used, to denote an inward reverence or esteem of that Being whom we worship. This is essentially necessary, in order to give it any just title to the name of worship.

For who would be so absurd as to imagine, that a senseless image paid him any real homage or respect, only because it is so contrived, as at certain times, to fall down before him, though it hath no consciousness of his merit, or intention to do honour to it? We are made capable of conceiving high and reverential thoughts of the Being, we make the object of our worship; but on supposition, that we have no such esteem, no such reverence of that

Being, we do no more, properly speaking, worship God, by falling down before him with the outward signs of homage and reverence, than statues or images, falling down before ourselves, could be said to worship us. Therefore, our blessed Saviour, when he taught his Disciples two of the most important things, which can fall under human consideration, and the most necessary of all others to be known by us; when he would instruct them *, as far as they were capable of being instructed, in the nature of God, and the manner in which they ought to worship him, tells them: *That God is a Spirit, and that they who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.* We must worship him *in spirit*; for otherwise we do not truly worship him, however we may outwardly appear to do it. And we must worship him *as a spirit*, or spiritual being, of infinite excellences and perfections; such as are every where in scripture declared to belong unto God, and can belong only to

* John iv. 34.

a Being, infinitely removed from all those imperfections, which are natural to, and inseparable from, all material or bodily substances, and who indeed is infinitely superior to all other beings whatsoever.

Our worship of God then as a spirit, or spiritual being of such infinite excellencies and perfections, consists primarily in such apprehensions of him in our minds, as are suitable to this absolute perfection and excellency of his nature, and the several relations in which he stands towards us; particularly, his being our Creator, and the maker of the worlds visible and invisible; the Redeemer of Mankind, from a lost and fallen estate, to a state of grace and favour by the mediation of his Son; and the Sanctifier of our natures through the influence of his spirit, that we may be rendered meet for the glorious inheritance of the saints in light, and finally obtain the everlasting possession of it.

These being the apprehensions we ought to have of our Maker, who is become our Saviour, as a spirit, or spiritual being of such perfections, and to whom we have such obligations, we cannot be said to worship him as such a spirit, unless our minds are possessed with such apprehensions of him, as are agreeable to these perfections, nor without such affections of our minds, as are suitable to those apprehensions. If we are therefore to think of God, as the greatest and best of all Beings, endued with infinite wisdom, goodness, and power, with how much fear and love ought we then to worship him, in the congregations held for making our religious addresses to him, on his Sabbaths, set apart, sanctified for his worship and service?

As we should then meet to confess him to be our Maker and Saviour, to recognize or acknowledge his power and dominion over us, and over the whole creation, is it not then becoming us, to consider the greatness of that power by which he gave

us our being ; who can continue us in life during his pleasure, by that living soul he has given us ; who can make both our souls and bodies cease to be, or render us miserable or happy in both to all eternity ? How awful is this reflection ? What care should it excite us to take of our behaviour towards him ? And when we reflect farther on the various instances of his goodness to us, not only in the bountiful provision for our sustenance and accommodation in this life, but for our future happiness in a better, by giving us the knowledge of his will, and the most effectual helps and assistances to do those things that are well pleasing in his sight, that we may hereby escape the awful punishments reserved for all impenitent transgressors, and finally be removed to a world of endless happiness : Oh ! how reasonable, how becoming us will it appear, that by such reflections we should be excited to the love of the great Author of our lives and mercies ! For as love and gratitude are proper affections of our souls,

when we reflect on favours or benefits received, so these affections should never be wanting in us when we worship God ; because they are the most natural consequences of those just apprehensions we ought to have of his Divine Majesty ; who, as he is most awful with regard to his power and dominion over us, so he is most amiable likewise with respect to his goodness manifested to us. Now these two affections of fear and love, when united, as they ought always to be in our worship of God, constitute that reverence, and godly fear, with which we ought to worship him ; and include or imply that trust and faith in him, which are necessary to encourage, and to render acceptable all our devotions.

Thus I have considered the internal, or inward requisites of that worship, which God requires from us ; and shew'd, with what apprehensions and dispositions we ought to make our religious addressees to him, either when we are alone, or when we meet together for his public worship. But,

(2.) There are, as I observed, some outward marks, or proofs, to be given in public worship, of our having such apprehensions and fixed sentiments of the divine perfections. *For we are to glorify God in our bodies, and in our spirit* *, or soul. And if the worship of God is, as it certainly is, one way or method of glorifying him, *we must worship him both with our souls and bodies*; that is, by making our outward behaviour correspond with, and be expressive of, those sentiments of esteem and reverence, with which our minds ought then to be filled. St. Paul has given us an excellent direction herein; when, speaking of the assemblies held in his time for the public worship of God, he commands, *that all things should be done decently and in order* †.

Now decency and order necessarily require some uniformity, agreement, or joint observance of the same gestures, actions, services, that all may appear to be doing the same thing at the same time. Herein

* 1 Cor. vi. 20.

† 1 Cor. xiv. 40.

our Church hath been careful to give her members proper directions; as, that we should kneel, bow down before our Maker, put ourselves in the posture of humble supplicants, whilst we are praying for the pardon of our sins, and beseeching him to bestow on us the blessings of heaven.

Whilst this part of public worship is performing, can it then be decent in itself, or becoming us, that some should appear humbly and reverently imploring God's grace and favour, whilst others give no tokens, or no significant ones, that they are in like manner affected?—standing, whilst others are kneeling, as if they had not the same concern in what was then doing, or could, without any offence, appear as if they had not the like concern therein. Where is uniformity, or decency, in such a behaviour? What regard do we pay to the Apostle's injunction herein, or to the directions of our Church in her *rubrick*, or to the reason or fitness of things? Whilst some are extremely attentive to the several

parts of the service which is then performing, shall others indulge in idle chat, or whispers, or sleep, or make unseasonable salutations to those at a distance from them, or irreverently loll at their ease, and yet make any pretensions to devotion or order, in the publick worship? Do they not rather shew a perfect disregard to whatever is becoming them, at such times, to do *?

And when we are called upon to sing to the praise and glory of God; whether, without some reasonable excuse for not doing it, we should not all use the posture of standing, which very commendably prevails in many congregations, as best fitting that alacrity, and together therewith, that reverence which this part of the publick

* In a little book, which I published for the use of my parishioners in the year 1746, intituled, *Piety recommended* (which was printed for Baldwin and Jefferies near Stationers Hall) the reader may find such additional directions, in regard to his behaviour in the publick service of God, and the observation of the Sabbath, as he may possibly esteem worth perusing.

service requires; or, whether some should make such their addressees sitting, whilst others are standing, and some appear as taking no share or part therein, neither with heart nor voice: This, methinks, is a matter in no wise difficult to determine.

When the Scriptures are read, or sermons on any parts thereof, we are only auditors, and may be indulged greater liberties, either of sitting or standing; may chuse the posture which best serves the purpose of hearing, and best keeps up that attention, which we should by all means endeavour to preserve—that *the word preached may profit us*; be so heard as to be remembered, and laid up in our minds, as the rule of our future conduct.

The profane disrespect to it which such persons discover, who idly chat with others, or sleep away that time, which is set apart for instruction in the weightiest matters which can be offered to their consideration, too evidently proves, they have no

sense of the Majesty of that holy and reverend Being, in whose more immediate presence they are, nor have well considered the importance of that work, in which they engage, when they go into the house of God. And after we have behaved so irreverently in it, we shall in all likelihood depart from it, not only without any Benefit, but with an increase of guilt, by so unbecoming a deportment there.

Let us now pause a while, to review what has been said. It hath been shewn, that the obligations to the publick worship of God are discernable, from the dictates of our common reason, and have been, probably at least, complied with universally by all good people, from a traditional account of that sanctification of the Sabbath, whereby, at the close of the creation, it was set apart by God himself, for commemorating that wonderful work. It hath been observed also, that after the *Israelites* were delivered from their *Egyptian* bondage, they were commanded to ob-

serve their Sabbath, in order to perpetuate a grateful remembrance of that signal mercy. We have further seen, that besides the obligations we are under, in common with the rest of mankind, of offering, on the weekly Sabbath, our thanksgivings to him, as the universal Creator and Lord, we have, as Christians, our peculiar obligations to the religious observance of it, from the amazing work of our redemption accomplished on it, by the resurrection of our Saviour *Jesus Christ*, whereby he triumphed over all the powers of darkness, and gave us full assurance, that he will hereafter raise us up to the inheritance of eternal life.

Now, how inconsistent is it with our Christian profession, seldom or never to join with those religious assemblies, which are held for keeping up, and expressing the thankful remembrance of this gracious work in our own hearts, and exciting and fixing it in the hearts of others? Doth it not look too like quitting our

claim to all the peculiar blessings promised by the Gospel of *Christ*, which render the present life desirous, and which he hath purchased for us, to compleat and perpetuate our happiness in a future one? Do we not indeed, as I have already mentioned, cease to make any real part of that living body, the Holy Catholick Church, in which, as often as we rehearse our Creed, we profess to believe, if we will not join in that communion of saints, which consists in uniting with our *Christian* brethren in all holy offices, and thereby wickedly lend our assistance towards extinguishing the *Christian* name and profession, and the very being of the church of *Christ* in the world?

It hath been farther made appear, that the mischief of a bad example is in this, as in every other respect, very great; and so much the greater, as those who give it are in a superior station.

This the great and the wealthy would do well seriously to consider; as from their example especially the principles and manners of those in inferior stations are very much fashioned and formed. Do they not, it may be reasonably asked them, wish that their children, their servants, their dependants, may be dutiful, obedient, honest, and virtuous? And do they know any way so likely to make or keep them so, as taking care that they perform the several offices of their respective stations, from a principle of conscience, and a regard to the obligations of religion? But what regard can there be to religion, without living in the fear and worship of God? And if the rich and great are estranged from both, what reason have they to expect, that their inferiors and dependents will answer the expectations of fidelity and diligence they have from them, or will not grow as profane and wicked as themselves? For there is nothing more certain, than that the best se-

curity of all moral virtue is an habitual reverence for Deity, and that regular worship of him, without which this reverence can never be duly impressed, or become constant and influential.

Those poor unhappy creatures, who rob, and steal, and commit such acts of violence as bring them to an untimely end, have, many of them, in their last hours, openly confessed, that the wilful breach of the *Sabbath*, by neglecting the duties of this sacred day, led the way to their entering on those wicked courses, which brought them to the shameful punishment they were about to undergo; which, in all human probability, they would not, and which I may venture to say, they could not have suffered, had they, by frequenting the worship of God, preserved a sense of religion on their minds: For they could not then have committed those crimes for which they suffered. Neither could any, who, from the fear of

temporal punishment, are restrained from committing the grosser acts of injustice, be guilty of any of those frauds and iniquities, which, as not being open and manifest, are incapable of legal conviction, and cannot therefore be punished by human laws *.

Even such secret frauds would be detested, and men afraid of committing them, under this regard to the inspection of God over them, and their duty to him; a due sense of which, amongst the generality of mankind, cannot possibly be preserved,

* “ The greatest and most powerful lawgivers attempt nothing farther, than to regulate the outward actions of mankind; but the just principles of the *Christian* Religion would weed out and destroy those vicious inclinations, which are the roots and sources of evil, and implant, in their room, the contrary dispositions of virtue and goodness.”

Bp. of *St. Asaph's* Sermon before the Society for reformation of manners, p. 12.

without a regular and constant resort to his sanctuary, at the time appointed for his publick worship. For as there is no other restraint from those private sins, of which human laws can take no cognizance, but from a serious respect had to the will of God forbidding them; and no respect can be had to his will by such, as neither worship him with private or publick worship; so, I believe, it may be truly said of all such persons in general, who do not attend on the publick worship, that they have little or nothing to do with private devotions; and therefore live as without God in the world; that is, without any regard to his will at all.

As to the various pretences, or excuses, for not attending the publick worship, made by those who are criminal in this respect, they will be found, on examination, of no weight. Yet, as there are too many who urge them, as if they were suf-

sufficient to justify them in their neglects, they should have a proper answer.

Some, it hath been observed, are wont to shelter themselves under the misbehaviour of others, who, tho' frequenting the publick worship of God, are found no better than many of those who are often, or totally, absent from it. To this it may be replied, that the means of grace seldom, or ever, operate on any persons, without a due attention to, and becoming improvement of them; and that it is this care to improve them, which generally gives them their efficacy. Praying, for instance, and hearing the word of God, which are appointed as means of grace, can be attended ordinarily with no good effect to those who are careless hearers, or indevout petitioners. Indeed, how is it possible, that with such a prevailing indisposition of heart, they should receive any benefit from their prayers, or improvement in holiness from the word of

God read, or preached to them? In one considerable respect indeed, even these indelicate petitioners, these careless hearers, are certainly in a more hopeful state than those who either pray not at all, or never put themselves in the way of being instructed in, or reminded of their duty. Their hearts may be opened, and their attention to their duty excited, under the example of those, whom they then see behaving better than themselves, and by the repeated admonitions they receive; to which it may be reasonably hoped, they will not always turn the deaf ear. Whilst others, who will not statedly resort to the church of God, which is the house of prayer, and of instruction in their duty, cannot in the nature of the thing grow in knowledge and grace, by means which they throw contempt on, and will not make use of for the sacred and beneficial purposes of their institution.

A second pretence, to excuse wilful absence from the assemblies held for publick worship, is founded in a mistaken, presumptuous opinion of some, that they stand in need of no such means of growing better; that, being just in their dealings, sober and temperate in their lives, and friendly to their neighbours, they are as good, as there is any obligation upon them to be.

So far, if they speak truth herein, all is well, as to two great branches of their duty, that which regards our neighbour and ourselves. But it should be remembered, there is another very considerable branch of duty, to which such persons seem to have no regard; that, I mean, *of living godly in the world**. Now to live godly, is to live in the exercise of all the duties of piety towards God; which are all left out in the ac-

* Titus ii. 12.

counts such persons give of their righteousness,

Besides this, there may be one capital defect in all the moral virtue they boast of, arising from their having no respect to the will of God, but a mere regard to worldly motives: As, for instance, when they are temperate for no higher or better reason, than because temperance is conducive to health, and just and honest, because honesty and fair dealing are essentially requisite, to obtain and preserve that reputation among men, which is generally necessary to their thriving in the world, and to keep them safe from the penalty of human laws; or, they do offices of humanity and kindness to others, because they find this a proper and very likely means of getting their esteem; which, on sundry occasions, may prove very beneficial to them. A regard to their obligation thus to act, from a principle of obedience to the will of God, may make no part of their inducement to the

practice of many things which have the appearance of virtues, but which, not being practised from a regard to the divine will commanding them, lose the very essence of *Christian* virtues, and are greatly defective even considered as moral ones. And that this is the case of those I am speaking of, is very evident from hence; because, if they acted from a sense of their duty to God, and a regard to his will, this principle of action would of course lead them to an equal regard to all his commandments, and therefore most certainly to those, which have respect to his more immediate worship and service. So that by being wilfully negligent herein, they prove that their virtue is not so great as they imagine it, because they leave out some of the noblest motives and inducements to practise it; that they have no title to be reckoned in the number of those good and faithful servants, who have acted out of regard to the will of God; and they have therefore great reason to fear,

that they shall, on the contrary, be found to be very criminal transgressors of it.

(3.) There are others who endeavour to excuse themselves from their attendance on publick worship, by the distance of their dwellings from their parish churches, the badness of the roads leading thither at some seasons of the year, or want of sufficient health to go abroad, or the inclemency of the weather.

To judge of the real weight of such excuses, and to know whether their absence from the services of the church on these, or the like pretences, is consistent with a sincere desire of approving themselves God's faithful servants, let them ask themselves this plain question: *viz.* Whether the same causes would keep them at home, if the church was a place for holding a market, or fair, where they might traffick for gain, or partake of any publick diversions? If no such causes would have kept them from

thence, was it a place for buying or selling, or serving the ends of sensual pleasure, or worldly profit, they may be assured, they have no sincere regard to their duty to God, if they allow such pretences to prevent their joining in his publick worship.

Let me then earnestly beseech all sorts of persons to lay these things to heart; and let me more particularly exhort parents, and masters of families, to behave agreeably to what, I hope, hath been made appear to be their duty. Let me intreat them to comply therewith, not only by a devout and regular attendance on the service of the church on the Lord's day, in their own persons, but by taking care, that their children and servants attend them thither, according to the power and authority given them. This authority and power parents and masters certainly have. The Law which commands the observation of the *Sabbath* has a direct reference

thereto. For the fourth commandment is addressed to the head of every family. The prohibition of the exercise of that labour, which is a profanation thereof, is addressed first to them; and through them, to those under their direction and government: *Thou shalt not do any work therein, Thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant* *; implying, that the guilt of the transgression of children, and servants herein, will be carried to the account of their parents, or masters, if they use not their power and authority to prevent or punish it.

The like may be observed, from the well-known commendation of *Abraham*, before mentioned: *I know him, that he will command his children, and his household after him; and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment*; signifying, that as he was invested with power and authority, to enable him to serve this great

* *Exod. 20.*

and good purpose, he would certainly make use of it to that end.

So that the master of every family hath, as hence appears, a cure of souls committed to him, as really and truly, as the minister of every parish. And on his conscientious discharge of his duty in this respect, his own, and the salvation of those under his care, do very much depend. It greatly concerns him therefore, to look well to it, that they neither want his instruction, nor his example to recommend his instruction, nor any reasonable proofs of his displeasure, for the amendment of their disobedience to his orders in this respect.

Should any of you say, you are not able to give religious instruction, either to your children or servants; so much the more reason is there for your carrying them with you to the house of God, that you and they may hear his word read, and preached for

your mutual benefit, for your information in what you do not, as well as exciting your attention to what you already understand of your duty; of which the most knowing have indeed frequent occasion to be reminded.

And this shews the weakness of another objection, which many persons make against attending the publick worship of God, and the services of the church; *viz.* that they know as much as their ministers can tell them. Supposing they do, may they not want to have what they know recalled to their remembrance? Is the only end of going to church, to be informed of something new? No, surely; but to have those principles, and duties, and motives, recollected, and impressed on their hearts, which, tho' they may already, in some measure, understand, yet are too much kept out of their minds by the cares of life, and their love and pursuit of the amusements and pleasures of it. So that

a minister in preaching is to act like the holy apostle in writing; to be diligent to put his hearers always in remembrance of those things which they know, *and those truths in which they are established*, to stir them up by a recollection of them, *and to take care that they may always keep them in their memory* *.

It may be added, that the pretence to know as much as their ministers, is oftentimes vain and ridiculous, and made by persons who know little, or nothing, of the principles and obligations of religion, and have need of instruction in most of the essential doctrines and duties of *Christianity*.

It should also be observed, that the church is not only a place for giving and receiving instruction, but for offering the solemn sacrifices of thanksgiving and prayer

* 2 Pet. i. 12,—15.

to Almighty God; and that therefore all who habitually absent themselves from it, do criminally withdraw themselves from that publick worship of God, which every one is bound in duty to join in, as he values his own improvement in piety, and as a friend to the publick peace and welfare; which cannot be effectually secured upon any solid foundation, without a regard to God, and the exercise of publick devotion.

But let it be supposed, you are as knowing as your ministers, and able to give those of your household the very same instructions, which are given by them in the congregation, at the times of publick worship; yet by wilful absence from thence, you deprive yourself and your family of that peculiar blessing, which may be expected from the performance of this important duty, the worship of God with the assemblies of his people, to which he hath promised his special gracious presence.

Neither is it much, if at all, to be expected, that such persons will give their families any religious instructions, or perform any religious worship with them at home, who will not resort to the place appointed, and at the time set apart by God himself for publick worship and instruction; experience too fully proving, that they who neglect publick worship seldom or never regard private, and so never exercise themselves in any worship at all.

Under this neglect of obliging your families to resort thither, *they are in great danger of perishing for lack of knowledge**. And, is this performing the part of a faithful and wise steward, appointed by our common lord and master, to preside over those of his household? *Do we give them, think you, their portion of meat in due season†, or in any such manner as is*

* Hof. iv. 6.

† Luke xii. 42.

expected from us, if we provide them only things needful for the body, whilst we are wholly negligent of their spiritual wants and necessities? Do we not, by suffering them to wander out of the way of understanding, or not directing them into it, suffer them, as *Solomon* speaks, *to remain in the congregation of the dead* *? For they are to be numbered with those who are dead, as to that life which a rational being ought to live, who continue ignorant of their duty, or regardless of it.

Let private instruction then prepare the way for publick teaching. Let neither your children, nor servants, be unacquainted with the principles of our holy religion, as taught in our church catechism, nor with the holy scriptures; especially in those portions thereof, which are appointed to be read in the congregation every Lord's day. Let them be seriously examined as

* Prov. xxi. 16.

to what they can remember of the sermons of their proper pastors; *that what they have heard may not be as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again; or, as seed sown by the way side, never coming to any perfection, or yielding any increase**.

Let me only add, that it should be the parent's or master's care, to furnish each of his children and servants, who can read, with a *Common Prayer Book* at least; that they may be enabled to take that share in the service of the church, which is appointed them, by making their proper Responses. With the nature of these they should be acquainted, as well as with the folly and danger of making them, unless they duly consider their proper meaning, and repeat them with that seriousness and sincerity of mind, which should ever attend them. This will prove a means of fixing their attention to what is doing, and

* Matth. xiii. 19.

render their responses exceedingly useful to them.

By this religious care of parents and masters in their respective families, that degeneracy of manners, which prevails, may be checked, and that reformation of manners, so much wanted, and so earnestly to be desired, may be promoted: And from no other source can it be expected. It must take its rise in private families. The worship of God must be therein taught, and practised, before we can expect a more regular attendance on his publick worship; hope for more devotion in the prayers and praises we then offer up; or reap those benefits, which the instructions of holy Scripture, and the discourses on it from the pulpit, are intended and fitted to convey. These will always deserve, and always have your serious regard, and that of all your dependants, if you come thereto, prepared with a fit disposition of mind, and can

bring with you those of your household prepared in like manner.

Then will each family be a seminary of true religion; profaneness and impiety be put out of countenance, and a sufficient number be found, to stop that torrent of wickedness, which, from profane and wicked masters, or from careless and indolent ones, hath risen to such an height among us, as seems to threaten the ruin both of publick and private virtue. Both these must be grafted on the stock of true religion, and the practice of private, family, and publick worship, which are essential duties of it; duties necessary to the preservation of that fear of God, and that regard to his will, which lies at the foundation of all moral virtue; and is the only firm support of that obedience he expects from us, and by which alone we can shelter ourselves from the dreadful effects of his displeasure, or establish our title to the rewards of his acceptable servants.

And is not this your reasonable service? Can you be careless, whether those of your family, your children, or servants, perform this their duty to God, or not, on the Lord's day? Can you at all times exact from them a punctual observance of your own commands, and not reproach yourselves for shewing herein, that you value more, and take greater care of the being well served yourselves, than you do of that service which is due from you and them to God? And how can this consist with your obedience to that capital precept of the Gospel, you profess to believe the obligation of, *that of seeking first, or principally, the kingdom of God and his righteousness**, which you thus demonstrate is the least of your cares, and the lowest, if any part, of your concern?

How is it possible, this behaviour should consist with the great duty of *glorifying*

* Matth. vi. 33.

God in all things *? which surely should be the aim and endeavour of all men, as it is the great end of their being; and especially of *Christians, who are called by Jesus Christ to glorify God with their souls and their bodies, which are his* †. Can we think, we are serving this end, if on the very days appointed for honouring him, we are intent only on doing our own ways, and finding our own pleasure; regardless of every thing relative to his glory, and the service that should be paid him? If this be called *Honouring God*, what is *Dis honouring* him? The *Psalmist*, when he would express his sense of this duty, states it thus. *O praise the Lord with me, and let us magnify his name together* ‡. And very justly: *For the glorifying God* implies the publick and solemn avowal of the inward sense we have of the divine excellences and benefits, and the endeavouring that others may join with us, in expressing the

* 1 Pet. iv. 11. † 1 Cor. vi. 20. ‡ Psal. xxxiv. 3.

reverence of their hearts for God, and their sentiments of gratitude to him, who are under the like obligations with ourselves. And if this hath been little, or no part, of our care, will it not at last too evidently appear, that we have failed of answering the great purpose of our being sent into this world, and are utterly unworthy of being admitted into a better.

Shall we not then find ourselves intirely unacquainted with, incapable of, and ever averse to those acts and services, which make a great part of the employment, and the enjoyments of that happy place, where all conspire in the celebration of the divine perfections, and derive the most exalted and satisfying happiness from doing it. We should therefore account this life a kind of apprenticeship; wherein we are to learn, and habituate ourselves to the actions and services, by which we are to live happily hereafter. Those who mind only earthly things must needs be entire strang-

ers to the language, the manners, the relish, and pleasures, of that happy place, to which we are called, and for which we were made. For if we live here profanely negligent of our duty, and unaccustomed to the exercises of piety and devotion, it is as absurd to expect admittance into, or enjoyment in the state of perfect purity and holiness, in the future world, as it would be for any one here, to take delight in an art, or live by a business he is intirely a stranger to, and which therefore he is wholly incapable of making subservient to his profit, or pleasure. Finally, let it be the subject of your frequent and serious reflection, that the time is hastening on apace, when you must quit this transitory state, and will find your portion with those who have faithfully served God in this life, or with those who have continued wilfully disobedient to him.

What will you think, when you are about leaving this world, of your own

contemptuous neglect of the worship of God, or of your not admonishing, and obliging those of your household, to resort to the places appointed for it, on his *Sabbaths*? Will you not, on a review of your behaviour in this respect, become conscious, that you yourselves, and those of your family, must then appear under one and the same character of servants? For in this stile the Great Judge of quick and dead will address all who are summoned to judgment: *Well done, good and faithful servant**; or, *O thou wicked and slothful servant*†. For servants we all of us are of the Most High God. And shall we defraud, rob him of that honour which is due unto him from those, who are more truly, more rightfully, his servants than they are ours? Shall we refuse to let him have even a small portion of that day he hath sanctified? For it is but a very small part thereof which is required for

* Matth. xxv. 21.

† Matth. xxv. 26.

publick worship. Shall we make ourselves partakers of all that guilt, which others have contracted thro' our bad example, or through the want of that seasonable instruction we ourselves should have given them, or which we should have put them in the way of receiving from others; and not dread, for our having neglected both, the sentence and condemnation of those slothful and wicked servants, who have not only their own faults, but even the sins of others to be accountable for at the judgment-seat of *Christ*. How terrifying a reflection is this! Oh, how much doth it concern us carefully to avoid every occasion that may awaken it in our minds, in those moments of life, when we shall be least able to bear the distress and horrors that must then arise from it! Let not then the place appointed, set apart for, and appropriated to this very purpose, of jointly offering up our prayers and praises to God, be unfrequented by us. Let not the habitation of his house, the place where

his honour dwells, in which he hath bid us expect his especial presence and grace, and where his saints delight to appear, be profanely slighted and despised. Will not such rude neglect and impious contempt give us, whenever we begin to think with any seriousness, the greatest anxiety and trouble? How painful will the remembrance be, as often as we reflect, that so far from having been fervent in spirit, serving the Lord, and diligent in promoting his glory, we have deserted his worship, and withheld from him the honour that is his due! Will it give us any good hope, or real joy, to be in our last moments upbraided by our consciences, that we have injured the cause, and prevented the success of religion in the world by profaneness, or indifference to all the sacred institutions of it, instead of endeavouring to keep alive and cherish a spirit of piety, devotion and charity, in our own and others breasts, and keeping religion in countenance, by the encouragement and

influence of our own examples? The guilt of such offenders, if they will reflect on it as they ought, must appear to them as a wicked complication of ingratitude and impiety, and cannot but excite the dreadful, yet just fear of that divine indignation, which must be the final portion of all such, who will not in their day *see the things that belong to their peace*, who scorned instruction, and would not so much as put themselves into the way of it, nor seek that divine assistance, which is so graciously offered them, to enable them more faithfully to discharge their duty, and render the means, which God hath appointed, effectual for their eternal salvation and happiness.

If what I have here written, may prove thus beneficial to those, with whom I have a more immediate connexion, as their pastor, and be of such weight with others, who have profanely neglected the assembling together at the solemn stated times,

and in the places appointed for publick worship, as to persuade them to amend their conduct; and if any may be prevailed with, to appear in the assemblies of the sincere worshippers of God, with a better preparation of Heart, and to behave therein in a more decent and devout manner, than they have hitherto done; I shall rejoice and be thankful to God, as my end will be answered in this address to them, and the interest of religion, and their reformation, will be hereby promoted, to their own private advantage, as well as that of the publick.

F I N I S.



T I N I A

